DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 191 582 PS 011 682

AUTHOR Hoffman, Stevie
TITLE In the Best Interests of Children: A Process-Oriented Learning Enviornment.
NOTE 7p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Criteria; Curriculum; *Educational Environment; Elementary Education; *Evaluation Criteria; Formative Evaluation; *Humanistic Education; Learning Activities; Parent Participation; *Process Education; Teacher Characteristics

ABSTRACT

This article suggests criteria for creating a humanistic process-oriented learning environment. Human, physical and curricular components of the learning environment are considered. Guidelines for evaluating the implementation of a process-oriented learning environment are provided. (Author/RH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED191582

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Stevie Hoffman
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

IN THE BEST INTERESTS OF CHILDREN: A PROCESS-ORIENTED LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Stevie Hoffman Ph.D.
University of Missouri-Columbia

Few will challange the statement that childhood education programs must be planned in the best interests of children. There is apt to be disagreement, however, as to what are the best interests of young children, and even greater disagreement as to what makes the better school learning environment for youngsters. The purpose of this article is to suggest criteria for creating a humanistic, process-oriented learning environment with observable means for assessing the progress towards attainment of such a model promoting meaningful and joyful learning for children in the early school years.

Environmental Program Components. There are two important environmental components in educational settings: the physical component and the human component. The physical component of the environment provides adequate space, effective use of time, appropriate materials, and meaningful learning experiences. The human component makes possible an affective climate in which there is understanding of individual differences in the development, learning, and expressions of feelings and knowing in each unique child. This human environment includes:

- professional teachers who promote affective, cognitive, and psychomotor learning through the coordination of both environments to meet the developmental learning strengths of each child;
- supervisors and administrators who recognize and support the uniqueness of each member of the instructional and support services staff;
- parents who are an intregal part of the instructional and decision-making efforts toward building a home-school partnership in the educational processes of their children; and

PS011682

- a community which supports and promotes learning experiences and educational innovations in the best interests of all children.

Criteria for a Positive Learning Environment. The learning environment is more than just places and people. It is the matching of theoretical and philosophical underpinnings of curriculum growing out of the research literature and demonstrated to enhance children's learning. The following criteria are a match of theory and philosophy which advocates that the learner must act upon the environment more than the environment acts upon the learner, that learning must be meaningful to the learner, and that the total environment must be accepting and supportive of the integrative transaction of what the learner already knows and what is to be learned. These criteria are that:

- the curriculum should be open ended--process rather than product oriented;
- the learner must be able to make meaning out of what is to be learned and know when learning takes place;
- the teacher must know how, why, and when learning has occured for each child, not just what has been learned;
- the learning-teaching setting must provide for positive interaction between home and school, thereby reflecting the classroom society of cultural differences and similarities gained from the home learning environment.

The Learning Experiences and Materials. Although the learning environment focuses primarily upon the people who comprise the educational "cast" to choreograph the most important "play" in children's lives--their education--, the "props" in the play are also important. These are the tools for learning--the experiences and materials that must be selected with the learner, not the teacher, in mind. And they should reflect consideration of the following:

- experiences and materials that promote problem solving skills: where the process involved is what counts, not the end product; where organization and reorganization of concrete materials and shared ideas encourage hypothesizing, synthesizing and evalution--even by young children;
- experiences and materials that encourage interactive communication between child and teacher, child and child: where the expression of ideas, feelings, and knowing is fostered so that oral and written language grows out of meaning;
- experiences and materials that promote the growth of understanding of and feeling good about self and others for acceptance of both self and others;
- experiences and materials that foster scientific investigation: where curiosity about what makes things work, happen, and change is encouraged;
- experiences and materials that promote creativity: where the arranging and rearranging of experiences, images, feelings, and ideas is encouraged for self expression; and
- experiences and materials that encourage intrinsic self motivation and increases the chances for each child to make meaning out of the learning environment;

These experiences and materials, as part of the physical component of the learning environment, contribute to the ease with which young children and teachers work together. Selected on the basis of the above criteria, they make both learning and teaching, exciting, challenging, and more important, meaningful.

Assessment of the Learning Environment. The concern for evaluation and measurement looms large in the minds of all educators today. Accountability is an important issue. And, indeed, it should be. However, the underlying philosophy for evaluation of learning and teaching should be growth producing for the participants, should support initial efforts and ongoing processes rather than testing for end products, and should always leave the integrity of the learner and teacher in tact. In view of the criteria suggested for the creation of a humanistic, process-oriented

learning environment, evaluation must be made from the combined self-reports of all of the people involved. Process evaluation has positive attributes that should provide no threat in the risk-taking requisite to self evaluation. Preponents of such evaluation processes will be able to determine progress towards the attainment of the stated criteria with the consideration of the following.

The curriculum is open-ended because:

- there are a wide range of alternative materials and activities which encourage children to intellectually and physically act upon those within their cognitive, psychomotor, and affective stage of developmental learning;
- there is maximal emphasis on the world of social studies, science, and communicative experiences from which the child learns who he is, who others are, how they live and work together; what that is, how it works, and what it can do; and how people share their ideas and feelings with one another in oral and written ways;
- there are more child-initiated activities than teacher-initiated activities with an absence of teacher front and center and an abundance of learning resources provided by the teacher in consideration of process orientation importance rather than product orientation;
- there is maximum cognitive and/or affective communication between child and child and teacher and child, centered around the natural curiosity of the child, the feelings of the child, and the experiences which stimulate learning;
- there are more questions asked that promote more than one-word answers and discourage one-way "doingness";
- there is use of time and space that flows with the learning and where the clock and the furniture are not determinants of when and how children learn;
- there is an integration of learning rather than the fragmentation of teaching performance skills.

5: LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

The learner makes meaning out of what is to be learned and knows when learning has taken place because:

- there are more successes than failures and an abundance of enjoyment in becoming or being successful;
- there is belief that steps towards attainment of knowledge and the processes by which these steps are taken are more important than the final end product;
- there is a recognition of the efforts of other learners and a sharing in their accomplishments without fear of losing one's own self-esteem;
- there is a heard and felt emotional response from the teacher who also values the becoming as well as the being successful;
- there are meaningful skills learned in one context that are seen as clearly relevant and important to other problem solving experiences;
- there is an observable behavior that emits intrinsic motivation on the learner's part;
- there is demonstrated knowledge of the learning of meaningful skills;
- there is value received for uniqueness in self-expression and creativity;
- there is expressed joy in being a member of the learning community.

The teacher knows how, why, and when learning has taken place because:

- there is recognition of variances in skill levels of children without undue concern for progression to the "norm";
- there is provision of a variety of alternative materials and experiences for children to be doing different kinds of things and learning differently within the broad scope of curriculum;
- there is planning for the integration of children's learning;
- there is an ability to effectively individualize and personalize learning for each child;
- there is demonstration of confidence in the child's competence as an outgrowth of his/her own experiential home learning which builds upon the strengths of each child;

- There is demonstrated individuality in teaching style;
- there is a willingness to express personal and sincere pleasure--or perhaps concern and frustration--for what is or is not supporting the teacher-learning environment, and an equal willingness to work cooperatively to make success possible;
- there is demonstrated pride in teaching, and the belief and dedication to teaching necessary for continual self-growth in the profession.

Parents are active partners with teachers in the education of their children because:

- there is a sincere sharing of home values and cultural variances with the school;
- there is increased understanding of both home and school expectations;
- there is improved understanding of varying ways to meet the needs of each child, both at home and in school;
- there is increased participation by parents in classroom learning experiences;
- there is a demonstration of shared responsibility in decision-making for the educational well-being of all children;
- there are observable feelings of enhanced self-esteem as a parent and as a teacher of one's own child.

Some Parting Comments

People are our most important products and children are our most important people. They will become the problem solvers and decision makers in a future we cannot yet imagine. They must be provided the most positive of learning environments during their early learning years in school so that the potential for reaching adult responsibility is optimum. What is learned has value; but, the how and why of learning makes for creative thinking and innovative ways of determining solutions to unknown problems. When we provide such a learning environment for young children, then the school and community take rightful pride in the accomplishments of learners and teachers.